

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration" Supplement

Very few scenes in the life of Jesus make it into all 4 Gospels (other than their shared, extensive account of "Passion week"). Just two, to be exact: the baptism of Jesus, and the Feeding of the 5000.

When a word or work of Jesus appears in all three Synoptic Gospels that signals its importance. It means all three authors judged the information to be of the highest value for their readers.

The Transfiguration is one of those special scenes making it into all three Synoptics. However, this episode has yet another, rare distinguishing quality; it is mentioned specifically by an Apostle in one of the Letters. II Peter, to be exact. By virtue of inclusion in a total of four New Testament passages, the Transfiguration is one of the most accentuated events in the life of Jesus.

If that were not enough, it is *also* one of just three times in New Testament history when God the Father speaks in an audible voice. All these factors make this experience one of the truly rare and significant revelations of Jesus. We disciples need to give full attention to the message of this story.

This event is unlike anything you we have ever experienced. It's the kind of spine-tingling story that even the most imaginative Sci-Fi movie cannot approach. Passages like this in the Gospels cause modern skeptics to say: "This supernatural stuff is obviously invented story telling. Fake News."

This kind of attack on the veracity of the Gospel accounts is nothing new. Precisely the same objection was raised during the ministry of the Apostles. So Peter, who claims to have been there as an eye-witness, wrote:

*(16) "For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.*

*(17) For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is My Son whom I love, in whom I am well pleased' :-*

*(18) and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain."*  
II Peter 1.16-18

No, the Transfiguration is not a cleverly devised tale. None of the four Gospel content is made up. Think about it—if these were man-made tales you would expect to find plenty of other stories and characters like Jesus throughout world literature. They do not exist. Jesus and the Gospels are truly *one-of-a-kind* wonders.

Furthermore, if Peter were alive on earth today, still proclaiming these same stories, he would be the first to say:

"Look at me. Obviously, I am no Einstein! I am just a working-class guy, who happened to be loved by My God enough to be chosen to know His Son. I wear my heart on my sleeve. Inconsistency is my greatest character flaw. But hang out with me for a few days and you will be convinced of two things.

First, there is no way I am smart enough to invent stories like the Transfiguration. Jesus did not include that kind of genius in my DNA. Second, I am no liar. I tell it like it is. Everyone who knows me can trust my word. You cannot run a fishing business on Lake Galilee with a forked tongue. No one will do business with liars.

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration" Supplement 2

No, the only way I came up with this report is because it really happened, just like I am telling it. Why else would I tell a story that shows the whole world how foolish I was, and earned a rebuke from my heavenly Father as an extra bonus?

Case closed.

Luke is the Evangelist who makes much of the "prayer" discipleship theme of Jesus. Only his Gospel tells us that the Transfiguration happened because of prayer. Jesus climbed the mountain specifically to pray, not to experience transfiguration.

As He continued in prayer (it was typical for Jesus to spend hours praying every day), His physical appearance was so transformed in glory that *"His face was shining like the sun."* (MT 17.2) In other words, too bright to look at! This gleaming radiance shining through His clothing made them *"intensely white, like no launderer on earth could bleach them."* (MK 9.3) Luke says the whiteness was like *a bolt of lightning*, if you were able to capture that momentary flash and keep it shining like a light bulb.

We can only wonder what people at the base of the mountain thought was happening when they looked up to find that tiny spot of gleaming light, beaming like the sun on the mountainside!

Jesus "'transfiguration" signaled a temporary, limited return to the state of glory that characterizes the Godhead in heaven. Paul testifies that the Father dwells in *"unapproachable light, Whom no man has seen or can see."* (1 Tim. 6.16) The Psalmist began Psalm 104 with these words of praise:

*Praise the Lord, my soul.  
O LORD my God, You are very great; You are clothed with splendor and majesty.  
He wraps Himself in light as with a garment... Ps. 104.1-2A*

The Psalmist is thinking here of the beginning of creation. The first spoken words of Jesus (according to John) in the Bible are: *"Let there be light. And there was light."* Gen. 1.2

Jesus was the designated member of the Trinity at work in creation. He "turned on the Light" in the universe with just a Word. He who *is* Light can create light instantly, out of nothing. So light is an expression of God's eternal glory.

Jesus lived in this glory in eternity past before His incarnation. Now He was preparing to return to the same state of lighted glory following His upcoming death and resurrection. This experience gave Him a brief foretaste of what awaited Him after the agony of the cross.

Next we discover that Moses and Elijah showed up (were made visible by God) *"in glory."* Like Jesus, they were visible in a glorified state—even though both of them were still awaiting their eternal, resurrection bodies.

This shows us that believers who have "died" have shed their earthly bodies, but they are very much ALIVE in the invisible realm, and recognizable too, as they look forward to the final resurrection. Jesus would later say about His Father: *"He is not the God of the dead, but of the living!"* (MT 22.32)

### The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration" Supplement 3

Moses and Elijah were real men, both prophets, and they were visiting with Jesus as two individuals. But they also represent the Old Testament Law (Moses) and the Prophets (Elijah), because both men were associated with these two major portions of Old Testament Scripture.

Moses is the prophet God used to give us the Pentateuch, or the "the Law." Elijah did not write any of the books of "the Prophets" in the Old Testament, but he was the head of the "prophetic movement" that culminated in the 16 written books of the Prophets. Elijah is the symbol and representative of these books.

Jesus enjoyed an extended conversation with these two men about his "departure" (His upcoming death and resurrection). Luke quotes Jesus after His resurrection saying:

*"Didn't the Christ have to suffer these things, and then enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said about Himself in all the Scriptures." L 24.26-27*

This is the kind of fellowship in the Word that graced a lonely mountain bathed in glistening, white light. What a scene.

How encouraging to Jesus! His transfiguration reminded Him of all the glory He would enter into after the unspeakable suffering of the Cross. And, Moses and Elijah knew the Scriptures that predicted the sufferings of Christ, so they could encourage Him by agreeing with His interpretation of all the things written about Him in the Old Testament, like no one else.

This double confirmation was even more important to Jesus because He has just begun to tell his disciples about His death and resurrection, and they *refused* to believe it. Peter had even rebuked Him for talking of such (Mark and Matthew tell us this). Jesus had no support or fellowship with *anybody* on earth about this, His most important mission in life, and so He was clinging to the Scriptures and finding all of His strength in the Presence of His Father as he looked to the cross. The Transfiguration gave a mighty boost of consoling confirmation to Jesus on His journey to the cross.

But there was one more *supremely* strengthening thing for Jesus at the Transfiguration: *the voice of His Father*. The same Words that came out of heaven at His baptism (which also pictured the centrality of His death and resurrection in His ministry) were given to Jesus at the very climax of His Scriptural fellowship with Moses and Elijah:

*"This is My Son that I love, my Chosen One."*

Something much Greater than even Moses, Elijah, and the Scriptures strengthened Jesus in those precious moments. The Father affirmed in an audible voice that He loves His Son especially because Jesus is obedient even unto death.

Jesus said in *John 10.17*: *"My Father loves me because I lay down My life—and I take it up again."* Though no person on earth could fully conceive or receive the mystery of what would transpire on the cross, the Father knew what would soon happen there. And He loved His Son for that very reason. So the Father spoke on the Mount: *"This is my Son that I love, my chosen One."*

THIS is what makes Calvary the miracle of the ages. *It is the value of the cross and resurrection to GOD that makes it efficacious for us on earth.*

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration" Supplement 4

Only the Father, Son, and Spirit can fully appreciate the magnitude of these events. So His Father's voice encouraged Jesus to press on through the cross to enter into the glory that would follow. This was the eternal plan of the Trinity for Jesus, and He must DO it!

Luke therefore characterized the cross as an "exodus" that Jesus was going to "accomplish" in Jerusalem. Yes, He will be delivered over into the hands of sinful men. But Jesus is ever in control—He *lays down His own life.*" No one takes it away from Him; HE gives it up according the eternal redemptive plan of the Father, as prophesied in Scripture.

Jesus is no victim in this view; He is the VICTOR in full control of everything that happens to Him, on His way to release and freedom through departing earth for heaven!

Jesus also *"takes up His own life"* again in resurrection. In other words, He is going to raise *Himself* from the dead! Like everything else He does, Jesus' resurrection will happen in full union with His Father and the Spirit, but it will include the exercise of His own will—and be His own accomplishment as well.

All this and more was the message for Jesus in His Transfiguration. Aren't you grateful that Jesus got this kind of encouragement from His Father, to see Him through the cruel, bloody, agonizing journey to Golgotha? We should also be thankful that the Father gave us some special lessons in following Jesus on the Mount as well.

### The Father's Transfiguration Lesson for the Disciples

Luke is the only synoptic evangelist that shows us the disciples sleeping through most of this spell-binding event. In fact he describes a really deep sleep, like Rip Van Winkle sleeping all the way through the American War of Independence. What a picture of distracted discipleship! Jesus is experiencing one of the greatest highlights of His 33 years on earth, and the three disciples are blind and oblivious to it all. And it only gets worse.

Finally, the disciples woke up, and they saw the glory of their Lord, transfigured before their eyes. Note that Luke writes that *"when they were fully awake they saw His glory."* We too, need to fully wake up to the Glory of our Lord through what happened there. And, while they *"saw HIS glory,"* Luke points out that they merely saw *"the two men standing with Him."*

The implication is that Jesus in a different class of pre- eminence than Moses and Elijah. The rest of Luke's narrative expands upon this thought.

The disciples then witnessed Moses and Elijah discussing the cross and resurrection Scriptures with Jesus. This was the greatest panel discussion in the history of planet earth, and they were the only people there to see it. So far, so good. But, disaster strikes... Peter opens his mouth.

If there was ever a time to listen up and shut up, this was it. It is always dangerous to open our mouths, but Peter was a world-class foot- eater about to swallow his whole leg, too. What he had to say sounds innocent enough: *"Master, it is good for us to be here; and let us make three tabernacles: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah '– not really understanding what he was saying."*

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration'" Supplement 5

Luke points out that Peter was blabbering non-sense here. If he had really understood what he was saying, "the Rock" would have zipped his mouth shut, and fast!

Peter's statement was so offensive to the Father that He *instantly* formed the "Glory Cloud" that used to cover the Old Testament Tabernacle. As Jewish men well acquainted with their Old Testament history, Peter, James, and John were scared out of their wits as the Cloud of God's Presence suddenly formed, literally "*as he was speaking*." It began to move over them, and then they disappeared from each other's view in the impenetrable swirling white mist.

The disciples lay shaking on the ground like the vibration of the Space Shuttle on take-off. They were terrified!

All this happened in the mere seconds it took for Peter to make his screwball suggestion. If the Cloud were not enough, the Father finished silencing Peter with His own commanding voice, cutting him off while he was still speaking:

*'This is My Son, My Chosen One Whom I love; you (plural) keep on listening to Him!'*

What was offensive enough about Peter's suggestion to evoke such an instant, emphatic response from the Father? This is the key point of this hair-raising episode for us disciples. The Father spoke to us all, using the plural form of His present-tense imperative, so that we would not miss this.

Peter had suggested three Tabernacles, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. This classifies Jesus on a level of *equality* with Moses and the Prophets. These men were very good company to be sure. But they are *not* equal to Jesus! The Father was compelled to step in and cry out: "*This is My Son!*"

Like the Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Jesus Christ is utterly unique—He is the Eternal Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity. There is only One Father. There is only One Spirit. There is only One Eternal Son. Each person of the Trinity is in a league all their own, called 'Divinity.'

Moses and Elijah were sinful men, transformed into faithful prophets by the grace and power of God. But they are, and ever will be men. Jesus is and will ever be God the Son. Jesus is much *more* than a Prophet, though He is the Greatest Prophet, too. He is *the* Son that is eternally God, in the very same sense that the Father is eternally God.

As great as Moses and Elijah are, they are not worthy to lie face down in the dust and touch the dirt on the bottom of Jesus' sandals. They are not in *His* League...they are not Persons of the Holy Trinity!

And so the Father said to all three Apostles on the Mount, and to all of us as well: "*You all need to keep on listening to Him!*"

There is only One Man worthy of listening to *as God* in history, and that is Jesus, *the* Son of God. These words are *the Father's seal of approval* on the uniqueness and pre-eminence of His Son, and His role as The Living Word.

On a practical level then, *the four Gospels are the pre-eminent portion of Scripture for a disciple to study*. That is a vital implication of what the Father is saying at the Transfiguration. The Words of Jesus are not equal to

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration" Supplement 6

the words of Moses and the Prophets. All these men will join the heavenly hosts for eternity in worshipping Jesus. So the Father said: *"You all need to keep on listening to HIM!"*

Just in case you think I am over-stating the case here, please check out the Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter one.

*(1.1) God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, (2) has spoken to us in these last days through His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (3) And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;(4) having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. Heb. 1.1-4*

Obviously, these statements cannot be made of any of the prophets of the Old Testament through whom God spoke in the past. Among the persons and works recorded in the Old and New Testaments, Jesus Christ alone is the Creator incarnated in human flesh, and so His words and works are in a class utterly their own—they are fully Divine!

That is why the author of Hebrews quotes passages in the Psalms attributing Divinity to Jesus for the rest of Chapter one, and then goes on to say this at the beginning of Chapter two:

*(2:1) For this reason we must keep on giving much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. (2) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, (3) how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (4) God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.*

This author is concerned that disciples in his own day are already beginning to drift away from the content of the four Gospels. *"We must keep on giving much closer attention to what we have heard."* The writer is compelling us to a lifetime process of giving ever-greater attention to *"what we have heard."*

In other words, the four-Gospel content is not something we study intently, fully master, and then move on. *"Been there., done that"* does NOT apply here. This is something so important that we can never stop giving a greater measure of attention to it; forever!

The four-Gospel record of what *"was at the first spoken by the Lord,"* was confirmed for all believers through the testimony of the Apostles (*"those who heard"*), and God the Father bore witness to the veracity of their testimony as well, *by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit."*

Because the life and words of Jesus in the Gospels are unique in Scripture, the writer of Hebrews asks us all a very serious question:

*"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?"* The only answer is: *"We won't."*

That's what Jesus said about discipleship: *"How can a blind man lead a blind man? Won't they both fall into a pit?"* There is no escape from falling into the pit if we *"neglect so great a salvation."*

## The DAILY JESUS NEWS...Reading #130: "Jesus 'Transfiguration'" Supplement 7

In other words, we must do as the Father has commanded us all...we must *"Keep on listening to Him,"* and refuse to fall prey to the many distractions that entice us to stop doing that.

My friend, the plea and urgent warning of the writer of Hebrews to *"keep on giving much closer attention to what we have heard"* from Jesus would become an alarmed life-saver's blood-curdling scream if he were alive today. Too many of us have simply stopped listening to Jesus.

To sum this up: Jesus, and therefore His Word, is pre-eminent in all things. *This is the Father's message—spoken from heaven in an audible voice—so that we will stop making Peter's disastrous error of relegating Jesus and His teachings to a merely equal status with other prophets, individuals, and teachings.*

*The Words of Jesus are the most authoritative, important, essential portion of Scripture for His disciples to learn and obey.*